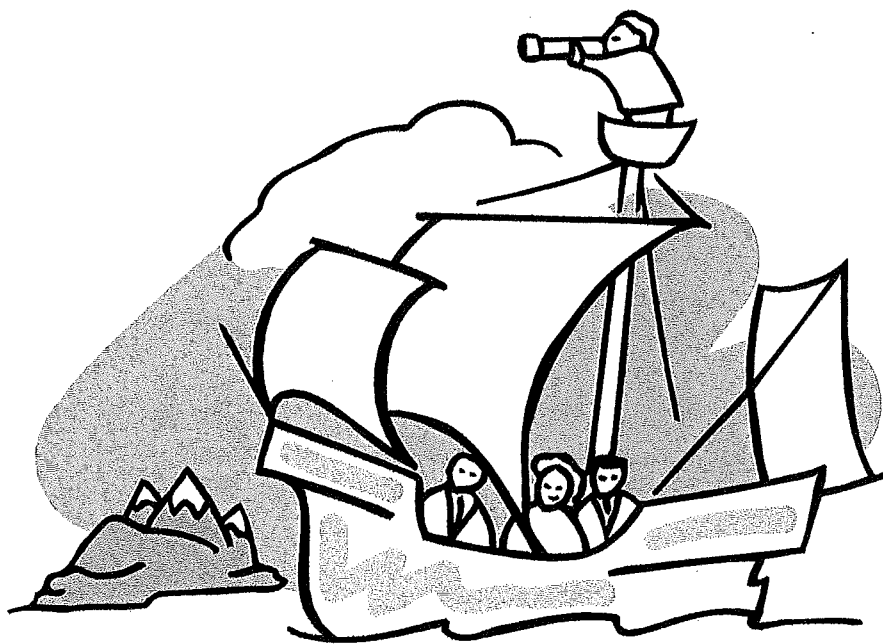


# **Journeys**

## **Through Time**



**Short Stories Packet**

# Journeys Through Time

***Spirits of the Railway* by Paul Yee**

Time Period: 19th century immigration to US  
Theme: Chinese Immigration to the US  
Literary Focus: *Plot*

***Princess Oreo Speaks Out* by Dwayne Carter**

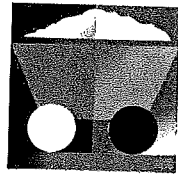
Time Period: Present day US  
Theme: Teenager Experience  
Literary Conflict: *External Conflict*

***Sound Shadows of a New World* by Ved Metha**

Time Period: 1950s  
Theme: Immigrant experience-Student/Teenager  
Literary Device: *Point of View/ Internal Conflict*

***Harriet Tubman* by Ann Petry**

Time Period: mid 1800s  
Theme: Slavery- Migration of slaves- necessity  
Literary Focus: *Mood*



# Spirits of the Railway

Paul Yee

One summer many, many years ago, heavy floodwaters suddenly swept through south China again. Farmer Chu and his family fled to high ground and wept as the rising river drowned their rice crops, their chickens, and their water buffalo.

With their food and farm gone, Farmer Chu went to town to look for work. But a thousand other starving peasants were already there. So when he heard there was work across the ocean in the New World, he borrowed some money, bought a ticket, and off he sailed.

Long months passed as his family waited to hear from him. Farmer Chu's wife fell ill from worry and weariness. From her hard board bed she called out her husband's name over and over, until at last her eldest son borrowed money to cross the Pacific in search of his father.

For two months, young Chu listened to waves batter the groaning planks of the ship as it crossed the ocean. For two months he dreaded that he might drown at any minute. For two months he thought of nothing but his father and his family.



▲ Ron Chan created the art for this story. Could the activities shown here have taken place at the same time? Why do you think the artist combined images of the workers and the train?

Finally he arrived in a busy port city. He asked everywhere for his father, but no one in Chinatown had heard the name. There were thousands of Chinese flung throughout the New World, he was told. Gold miners scrabbled along icy rivers, farmers ploughed the long low valleys, and laborers traveled through towns and forests, from job to job. Who could find one single man in this enormous wilderness?

Young Chu was soon penniless. But he was young and strong, and he feared neither danger nor hard labor. He joined a work gang of thirty Chinese, and a steamer ferried them up a river canyon to build the railway.

When the morning mist lifted, Chu's mouth fell open. On both sides of the rushing river, gray mountains rose like walls to block the sky. The rock face dropped into ragged cliffs that only eagles could ascend and jutted out from cracks where scrawny trees clung. Never before had he seen such towering ranges of dark raw rock.

The crew pitched their tents and began to work. They hacked at hills with hand-scoops and shovels to level a pathway for the train. Their hammers and chisels chipped boulders into gravel and fill. Their dynamite and drills thrust tunnels deep into the mountain. At night, the crew would sit around the campfire chewing tobacco, playing cards and talking.

From one camp to another, the men trekked up the rail line, their food and tools dangling from sturdy shoulder poles. When they met other workers, Chu would run ahead and shout his father's name and ask for news. But the workers just shook their heads grimly.<sup>1</sup>

"Search no more, young man!" one grizzled old worker said. "Don't you know that too

many have died here? My own brother was buried alive in a mudslide."

"My uncle was killed in a dynamite blast," muttered another. "No one warned him about the fuse."

The angry memories rose and swirled like smoke among the workers.

"The white boss treats us like mules and dogs!"

"They need a railway to tie this nation together, but they can't afford to pay decent wages."

"What kind of country is this?"

Chu listened, but still

he felt certain that his father was alive.

Then winter came and halted all work. Snows buried everything under a heavy blanket of white. The white boss went to town to live in a warm hotel, but Chu and the workers stayed in camp. The men tied potato sacks around their feet and huddled by the fire, while ice storms howled like wolves through the mountains. Chu thought the winter would never end.

When spring finally arrived, the survivors struggled outside and shook the chill from their bones. They dug graves for two workers who had succumbed<sup>2</sup> to sickness. They watched the river surge<sup>3</sup> alive from the melting snow. Work resumed, and Chu began to search again for his father.

Late one afternoon, the gang reached a mountain with a half-finished tunnel. As usual, Chu ran up to shout his father's name, but before he could say a word, other workers came running out of the tunnel.

Who could find one  
single man in this  
enormous wilderness?



1. grimly (grim'lē), *adv.* in a serious way, not offering hope; sternly, harshly, or fiercely.

2. succumb (sə kum'), *v.* die.

3. surge (sérj), *v.* rise and fall; move like waves.



▲ How has the artist created a ghostly setting for this scene?

"It's haunted!" they cried. "Watch out! There are ghosts inside!"

"Dark figures slide soundlessly through the rocks!" one man whispered. "We hear heavy footsteps approaching but never arriving. We hear sighs and groans coming from corners where no man stands."

Chu's friends dropped their packs and refused to set up camp. But the white boss rode up on his horse and shook his fist at the men. "No work, no pay!" he shouted. "Now get to work!"

Then he galloped off. The workers squatted on the rocks and looked helplessly at one another. They needed the money badly for food and supplies.

Chu stood up. "What is there to fear?" he cried. "The ghosts have no reason to harm us. There is no reason to be afraid. We have hurt no one."

"Do you want to die?" a man called out.

"I will spend the night inside the tunnel," Chu declared as the men muttered unbelievably. "Tomorrow we can work."

Chu took his bedroll, a lamp, and food and marched into the mountain. He heard the crunch of his boots and water dripping. He knelt to light his lamp. Rocks lay in loose piles everywhere, and the shadowy walls closed in on him.

At the end of the tunnel he sat down and ate his food. He closed his eyes and wondered where his father was. He pictured his mother weeping in her bed and heard her voice calling his father's name. He lay down, pulled his blankets close, and eventually he fell asleep.

Chu awoke gasping for breath. Something heavy was pressing down on his chest. He tried to raise his arms but could not. He clenched his fists and summoned<sup>4</sup> all his strength, but still he was paralyzed. His eyes strained into the darkness, but saw nothing.

Suddenly the pressure eased and Chu groped for the lamp. As the chamber sprang into light, he cried, "What do you want? Who are you?"

Silence greeted him, and then a murmur sounded from behind. Chu spun around and saw a figure in the shadows. He slowly raised the lamp. The flickering light traveled up blood-stained trousers and a mud-encrusted jacket. Then Chu saw his father's face.

"Papal!" he whispered, lunging<sup>5</sup> forward.

"No! Do not come closer!" The figure stopped him. "I am not of your world. Do not embrace me."

Tears rose in Chu's eyes. "So, it's true," he choked. "You . . . you have left us . . ."

His father's voice quivered with rage. "I am gone, but I am not done yet. My son, an accident here killed many men. A fuse exploded before the work-

ers could run. A ton of rock dropped on us and crushed us flat. They buried the whites in a churchyard, but our bodies were thrown into the river, where the current swept us away. We have no final resting place."

Chu fell upon his knees. "What shall I do?"

His father's words filled the tunnel. "Take chopsticks; they shall be our bones. Take straw matting; that can be our flesh. Wrap them together and tie them tightly. Take the bundles to the mountain top high above the nests of eagles, and cover us with soil. Pour tea over our beds. Then we shall sleep in peace."

When Chu looked up, his father had vanished. He stumbled out of the tunnel and blurted the story to his friends. Immediately they prepared the bundles and sent him off with ropes and a shovel to the foot of the cliff, and Chu began to climb.

*"We have no final resting place."*



4. **summon** (sum'ən), *v.* call; stir to action; rouse.

5. **lunge** (lunj), *v.* make a sudden forward movement.

When he swung himself over the top of the cliff, he was so high up that he thought he could see the distant ocean. He dug the graves deeper than any wild animal could dig, and laid the bundles gently in the earth.

Then Chu brought his fists together above his head and bowed three times. He knelt and touched his forehead to the soil three times. In a loud clear voice he declared, "Three times I bow, three things I vow. Your pain shall stop now, your sleep shall soothe you now, and I will never forget you. Farewell."

Then, hanging onto the rope looped around a tree, Chu slid slowly back down the cliff. When he reached the bottom, he looked back and saw that the rope had turned into a giant snake that was sliding smoothly up the rock face.

"Good," he smiled to himself. "It will guard the graves well." Then he returned to the camp, where he and his fellow workers lit their lamps and headed into the tunnel. And spirits never again disturbed them, nor the long trains that came later.

## Another Voice

### I Ask My Mother to Sing

Li-Young Lee

She begins, and my grandmother joins her.  
Mother and daughter sing like young girls.  
If my father were alive, he would play  
his accordion and sway like a boat.

5 I've never been in Peking, or the Summer Palace,  
nor stood on the great Stone Boat to watch  
the rain begin on Kuen Ming Lake, the picnickers  
running away in the grass.

But I love to hear it sung;  
10 how the waterlilies fill with rain until  
they overturn, spilling water into water,  
then rock back, and fill with more.

Both women have begun to cry.  
But neither stops her song.



# After Reading

## Making Connections

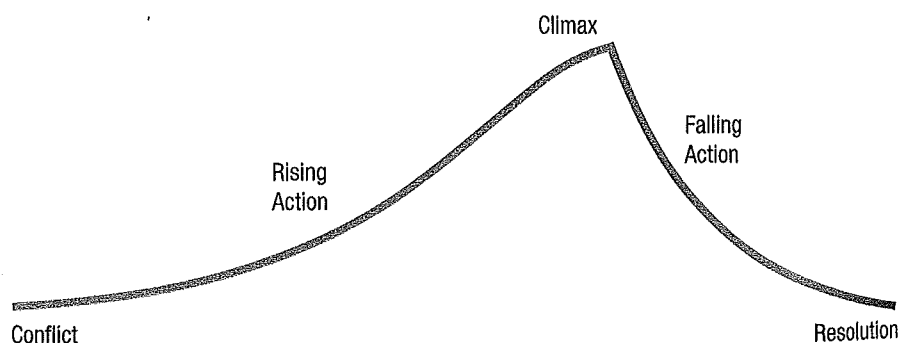
1. Does "Spirits of the Railway" bring comfort or fear? Why would it have been told by Chinese who came to America?
2. In what ways does this seem like a typical ghost story to you?
3. 🧐 What aspects of Chinese culture are revealed in this selection?
4. How does young Chu's journey **compare** with his father's?
5. What is the cause of his father's anger?
6. Compare the poem with the story. How are they alike? How do they differ?
7. A proper burial is important in every culture. Why do you think this is so?

## Literary Focus: Plot

Every story has a **plot**, a sequence of events that shows the characters in action. The elements of the plot usually follow this pattern:

<b>Background</b>	the setting and characters are established
<b>Conflict</b>	the story is set in motion with a problem
<b>Rising Action</b>	the characters do things to try to solve the problem
<b>Climax</b>	the turning point is reached; the outcome is decided
<b>Falling Action/Resolution</b>	loose ends are wrapped up; effects on characters told

Copy the plot structure map below into your notebook, and fill it in for "Spirits of the Railway" by summarizing the key events of the story that match up with each part of the plot.



grimly  
succumb  
summon  
lunge  
surge

### Vocabulary Study

Write the listed word that best completes each sentence.

1. When Chu ran up and yelled his father's name in a cave, the others shook their heads \_\_\_\_, thinking there was no hope.
2. The people who survived the winter dug graves for the people unfortunate enough to \_\_\_\_ to the cold.
3. The sight of the spirit made fear \_\_\_\_ through young Chu.
4. After he saw his father's face, he started to \_\_\_\_ forward, but his father told him to stay back.
5. Chu had to \_\_\_\_ all of his strength, calling it to help him.

## Expressing Your Ideas

### Writing Choices

**Mother, I Have News** While young Chu has been searching for his father, his family in China has been waiting for news. Now that Chu knows what has happened to his father, he decides to write to his family. Write the **letter** you think he would write, explaining the fate of his father. Write in the style you think Chu would use to address his family.

**The Gold Mountain** Many thousands of Chinese immigrants worked on the building of the railroads in the West. Research the topic and prepare a **report** to your class. Use library resources as well as online services to gather information.

**Long Division** This story could easily be dramatized. Review the story and decide how many scenes you would need in a play based on the story. Then write a **scene summary** that lists the scenes and the main action involved in each.

### Other Options

**Model Railroad** Young Chu was amazed at the size of the mountains: "Never before had he seen such towering ranges of dark raw rock." To give your class an idea of the size of the project of tunneling through these mountains, build a **model** that shows, in relative size, a typical mountain, a tunnel with a train in it, and a railroad worker. You will need to do some research to find the sizes of the mountains and trains.

**The Acting Spirit** Working in a group, select an important **scene** from the story to act out for your classmates. After you assign parts, you will probably have to rewrite some narration into dialogue. Rehearse the scene together until you can present it with the proper timing. You may wish to use props, costumes, and simple scenery.

**Best Spirit in a Starring Role** There is a contest for the best ghost story, and you are entering this selection. Each entry consists of a story and an illustration of the most powerful or dramatic moment of the work. Make the **sketch** or **illustration** you would submit to the contest.

# PRINCESS OREO SPEAKS OUT

By Dwan Carter

"If I wasn't looking at chu, I'd have thought you was white."

"Say that again, you said that mad white."

"You're just weird."

I often get comments like that from classmates, friends, and even my family. Sometimes I laugh back, but the comments also hurt my feelings. I know they don't mean anything by it, but I don't really like that they think I'm so strange.

I'm a dark-skinned female, a descendent of Africans. I grew up in a black family in a largely black neighborhood, and I'm conscious of the disadvantages that have plagued African Americans for generations. So what's the deal?

It seems that, for a lot of people around me, being black is an attitude. According to my peers, if you're black, you listen to hip-hop, R & B, and reggae. The ability to dance is a given, and of course, you know how to do dances like the Bankhead Bounce and wining. You eat Caribbean foods and Southern-style cooking and, if you're female, you know about head wraps and weaves.

Anything beyond that and it's like you're from another planet, or at least that's how I feel. I do a lot of things that people around me don't associate with being black. My friends laugh at me because I don't like certain black rappers. They love to tease me about watching TV shows that have mostly white characters.

It doesn't seem to matter that I also watch TV shows with mostly black characters. Because of my tastes and the way I talk (I use big vocabulary words), people jokingly call me "Oreo": black on the outside, white on the inside.

But to me, being African American means my skin color shows a history of enslavement and discrimination. Knowing my history and understanding where I come from is very important to me. It's what keeps me grounded and focused on taking advantage of the opportunities that African Americans fought for.

My dad instilled that knowledge and pride in me. As African Americans, he says, we should be in debt to those who risked their

lives to give us the opportunities we have, particularly

education. His understanding of what it means to be black has a lot to do with our history and our future.

But for my peers, being black has more to do with fitting into the culture right here and now.

They make me feel like I'm not black enough. And they tease me even more when I try to be (their version of) black.

When I try to be down with the slang and fit in, half the time I end up sounding like a fool.

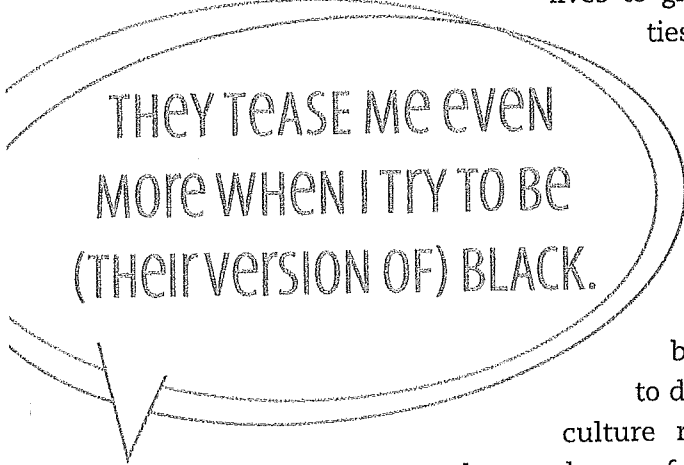
"Ah-ight, peace yo."

"You's a Doga man."

"Peace out, boo-boo."

It just doesn't come out right. The words get all jumbled and tumble out wrong, and my friends look at me as if I've spoken to them in another language. All my efforts end in giggles (I'm laughing at myself right now) or in gut-busting laughter with tears streaming down my friends' faces.

My friends tease me even worse when I try to show them that I can dance to reggae, calypso, and hip-hop. It just doesn't work well. I'd never get invited to Soul Train, more like Soul-less Train.



THEY TEASE ME EVEN  
MORE WHEN I TRY TO BE  
(THEIR VERSION OF) BLACK.

It's not just friends who paint me "white." One time, my sister and I were reciting some lyrics from a rap song. My sister was reciting the lyrics and I was singing the hook. I was trying to be just like the female singer—the bounce in her movements, the way she moves her neck, her hand motions, everything.

I was so into the song, I forgot my sister was in the room with me. I thought I was doing well until my sister's hard laughter broke my concentration. She was doubled over with tears streaming out of her eyes. She was laughing so hard she couldn't talk, and her hand was motioning for me to stop.

Then through bits of dying laughter she said, "Stop . . . stop trying to act ghetto, girl, you making my sides hurt." She said I looked like a duck having seizures.

I didn't let it show, but it hurt that even my own sister didn't see me as black enough.

What bothers me about being called white—besides the fact that I'm not—is that it makes me feel like I'm lacking something, and I'm not sure what it is.

My friend told me once, "Maybe one day you'll wake up and become Dawnesha." At the time, I was a geeky freshman in high school, insecure about who I was. I wondered if I could transform myself into someone my peers would recognize as a true black girl.

I'd have loved to put on those big hoop earrings I saw my friends wearing. I'd be wearing snake-patterned denim outfits, popping my gum, and showing off a nameplate that said "Dawnesha." My hair would be dyed, fried, and laid to the side. And when I'd rank on somebody, I'd use those fluid motions of the neck and hand that make the "African-American girl" infamous.

*Sigh.* I would've loved it. I just wanted to fit in.

Then reality knocked some sense into me. I didn't have enough attitude to pull that off. And it just wasn't me.

Now, as I reach my final semester of my senior year, I'm more aware of myself, who I am, and who I want to be: me. Even saying "Dawnesha" makes me feel weird. That's not who I am. Dwan is my name and I'm comfortable with that. Being different makes me

unique. I even gave myself a nickname, "Princess Oreo" (though my dad hates it).

I'm getting used to people staring at me when they hear me blasting rock music. I think it makes them feel uncomfortable because they're not used to an African-American girl bobbing her head along to rock and roll.

"Hey," I want to tell them, "music is music."

My reading tastes are diverse, too. I like to read books by white authors, such as Isaac Asimov and Tami Hoag, as well as by black authors, like Octavia Butler, Toni Morrison, and Malcolm X. Maybe it's because I read a lot that I talk the way I do.

It's not that I'm purposely acting white—it's not even a thought that crosses my mind. I just like what I like, and I don't know why other people can't be more open-minded.

Dwan Carter *was 17 when she wrote this story and later attended Spelman College.*

## THINK ABOUT IT

- ▶▶ Because Dwan is black, people assume she should behave a certain way. Have people ever assumed you should behave a certain way because of your race, the way you look, or for any other reason? How did that make you feel?
- ▶▶ Dwan tries to fit in by speaking slang, but it doesn't come out right because it isn't her. Have you ever tried to fit in with others by being someone you're not?
- ▶▶ The "acting white" issue is really about peer pressure. How big a problem is peer pressure in your life? Is it ever possible to totally ignore it?

# Sound- Shadows

## Ved Mehta

At the airport, I was questioned by an immigration<sup>1</sup> official. "You're blind—totally blind—and they gave you a visa?<sup>2</sup> You say it's for your studies, but studies where?"

"At the Arkansas School for the Blind. It is in Little Rock, in Arkansas."

He shuffled through the pages of a book. Sleep was in my eyes. Drops of sweat were running down my back. My shirt and trousers felt dirty.

"Arkansas School is not on our list of approved schools for foreign students."

"I know," I said. "That is why the immigration officials in Delhi gave me only a visitor's visa. They said that when I got to the school I should tell the authorities to apply to be on your list of approved schools, so that I could get a student visa." I showed him a big manila envelope I was carrying; it contained my chest X-rays, medical reports, and fingerprint charts, which were necessary for a student visa, and which I'd had prepared in advance.

"Why didn't you apply to an approved school in the first place and come here on a proper student visa?" he asked, looking through the material.

My knowledge of English was limited. With difficulty, I explained to him that I had applied to some thirty schools but that, because I had been able to get little formal education in India, the Arkansas School was the only one that would accept me; that I had needed a letter of acceptance from an American school to get dollars sanctioned by the Reserve Bank of India; and that now that I was in America I was sure I could change schools if the Arkansas School was not suitable or did not get the necessary approval.

# of the New World

1. immigration (im/ə grā/shən), *n.* coming into a foreign country or region to live.

2. visa (vē/zə), *n.* official document granting permission to travel to another country.

Muttering to himself, the immigration official looked up at me, down at his book, and up at me again. He finally announced, "I think you'll have to go to Washington and apply to get your visa changed to a student visa before you can go to any school."

I recalled things that Daddyji used to say as we were growing up: "In life, there is only fight or flight. You must always fight," and "America is God's own country. People there are the most hospitable and generous people in the world." I told myself I had nothing to worry about. Then I remembered that Daddyji had mentioned a Mr. and Mrs. Dickens in Washington—they were friends of friends of his—and told me that I could get in touch with them in case of emergency.

**CLARIFY:** What did Daddyji mean when he said, "In life there is only fight or flight"?

"I will do whatever is necessary," I now said to the immigration official. "I will go to Washington."

He hesitated, as if he were thinking something, and then stamped my passport and returned it to me. "We Mehtas carry our luck with us," Daddyji used to say. He is right, I thought.

The immigration official suddenly became helpful, as if he were a friend. "You shouldn't have any trouble with the immigration people in Washington," he said, and asked, "Is anybody meeting you here?"

"Mr. and Mrs. di Francesco," I said.

Mrs. di Francesco was a niece of Manmath Nath Chatterjee, whom Daddyji had known when he himself was a student, in London, in 1920. Daddyji had asked Mr. Chatterjee, who had a Scottish-American wife and was now settled in Yellow Springs, Ohio, if he could suggest anyone with whom I might stay in New York, so that I could get acclimatized<sup>3</sup> to America before proceeding to the Arkansas

School, which was not due to open until the eleventh of September. Mr. Chatterjee had written back that, as it happened, his wife's niece was married to John di Francesco, a singer who was totally blind, and that Mr. and Mrs. di Francesco lived in New York, and would be delighted to meet me at the airport and keep me as a paying guest at fifteen dollars a week.

"How greedy of them to ask for money!" I had cried when I learned of the arrangement. "People come and stay with us for months and we never ask for an anna."<sup>4</sup>

Daddyji had said, "In the West, people do not, as a rule, stay with relatives and friends but put up in hotels, or in houses as paying guests. That is the custom there. Mr. and Mrs. di Francesco are probably a young, struggling couple who could do with a little extra money."

The immigration official now came from behind the counter, led me to an open area, and shouted, with increasing volume, "Fransisco! . . . Franchesca! . . . De Franco!" I wasn't sure what the correct pronunciation was, but his shouting sounded really disrespectful. I asked him to call for Mr. and Mrs. di Francesco softly. He bellowed, "Di Fransesco!"

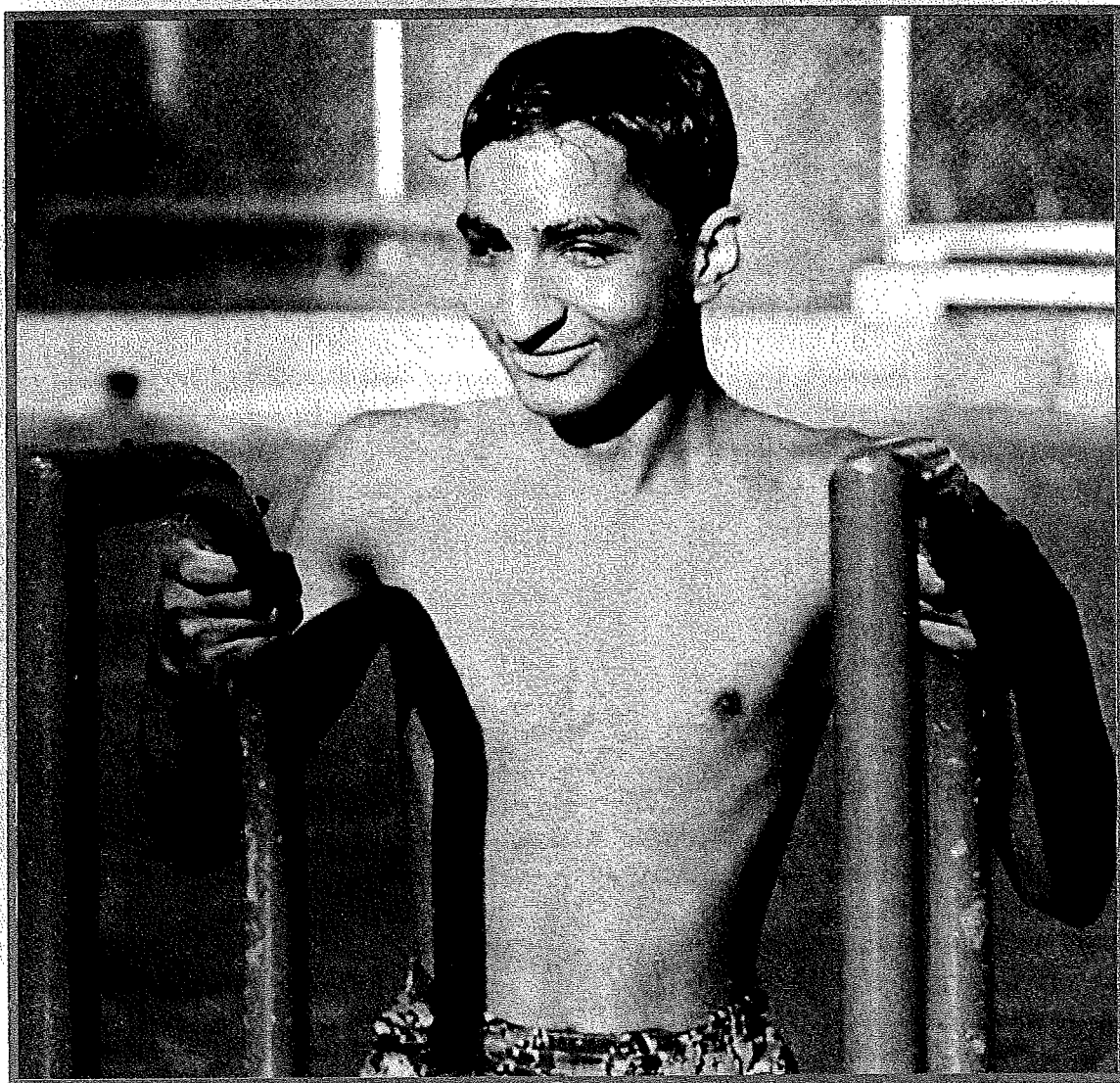
No one came. My mouth went dry. Mr. and Mrs. di Francesco had sent me such a warm invitation. I couldn't imagine why they would have let me down or what I should do next.

**T**hen I heard the footsteps of someone running toward us. "Here I am. You must be Ved. I'm Muriel di Francesco. I'm sorry John couldn't come." I noted that the name was pronounced the way it was spelled, and that hers was a Yankee voice—the kind I had heard when I first encountered Americans at home, during the

3. **acclimatized** (ə kli'mə tīzd), *adj.* become used to a new place or surroundings.

4. **anna** (an'ə), in India, a former unit of money equal to one-sixteenth of a rupee.





▲ Ved Mehta, age 16, was photographed at a swimming pool in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1950. Judging from the photograph and from what you have read, would you describe Ved as an optimistic person? Explain your answer.

war—but it had the sweetness of the voices of my sisters.

**W**e shook hands; she had a nice firm grip. I had an impulse to call her Auntie Muriel—at home, an older person was always called by an honorific, like “Auntie” or “Uncle”—but I greeted her as Daddyji had told me that Westerners liked to be greeted: “Mrs. di Francesco, I’m delighted to make your acquaintance.”

“You had a terrible trip, you poor boy. What a terrible way to arrive!” Mrs. di Francesco said in the taxi. “Imagine, everything stolen from a bag!”

One bag had contained clothes. The other, a holdall, had contained (in addition to some extra shirts) a number of ivory curios—statues of Lord Krishna,<sup>5</sup> “no evil” monkeys,<sup>6</sup> brooches with a little pattern on them—which Daddyji had bought with the idea that I could sell them at great profit. “You can take the ivory curios to a shop in Little Rock and ask the shop to sell them for you—on commission, of course,” he had said. “In America, a lot of people earn and learn. Who knows? Maybe we could start an ivory-export-import business in a year or so, when I retire from government service.” He was deputy director general of health services in the Indian government. “I expect there is a great deal of demand over there for hand-carved things.” The fact that neither of us had ever sold even a secondhand gramophone didn’t stop us from dreaming.

I didn’t want Mrs. di Francesco to feel bad, so I made light of the theft. “The other bag is still full,” I said.

“The ivory things must have been really valuable,” she said. She had helped me fill out the insurance-claim forms. “What a bad introduction to America!”

**Here I would  
travel in taxis  
amid new  
friends and have  
adventures.**

“But it could have happened in Delhi.”

She regaled<sup>7</sup> the taxi-driver with the story, as if she and I were long-standing friends. “And we had to wait at the airport for two whole hours, filling out insurance forms. And he only knew the prices in rubles.”

“Rupees,” I said.<sup>8</sup>

“Is that right?” the taxi-driver said, from the front seat. “Well, it shouldn’t have happened to you, son.”

I leaned toward the half-open window and listened for the roar of street crowds, the cries of hawkers, the clatter of tonga<sup>9</sup> wheels, the trot of tonga horses, the crackle of whips, the blasts of Klaxons, the trills of police whistles, the tinkling of bicycle bells—but all I heard was the steady hiss and rush of cars. “In America, you can really travel fast and get places,” I said.

Mrs. di Francesco took both my hands in hers and broke into open, unrestrained laughter. I have never heard a woman laugh quite like that, I thought.

“What are you laughing at?” I asked.

“I’d just noticed that all this time you had your hand in your breast pocket. Are you afraid of having your wallet stolen, too?”

I was embarrassed. I hadn’t realized what I had been doing.

The taxi-driver took a sharp turn.

“Where are we?” I asked.

“On Broadway,” Mrs. di Francesco said.

“Is Broadway a wide road?” I asked.

5. **Lord Krishna**, one of the most important Hindu gods.

6. **“no evil” monkeys**, three monkeys in a row. The first one sees no evil, the second one hears no evil, the third one speaks no evil.

7. **regale** (ri gāl’), *v.* entertain.

8. **rubles/rupees**, rubles are the money used in Russia; Mrs. di Francesco is confusing them with rupees, the money used in India.

9. **tonga**, a light, two-wheeled carriage used in India.

She laughed. "A very wide avenue—it's the center of the universe."

At home, the center was a circle, but here the center, it seemed, was a straight line. At home, I often felt I was on a merry-go-round, circling activities that I couldn't join in. Here I would travel in taxis amid new friends and have adventures. I tried to voice my thoughts.

"Poor boy, you have difficulty with the language," Mrs. di Francesco said, gently pressing my hand.

"English is difficult," I said, and I tried to make a joke. "When I was small and first learning English, I was always confusing 'chicken' and 'kitchen.'"

"'Chicken' and 'kitchen,'" Mrs. di Francesco repeated, and laughed.

"I have enough trouble speaking English," the taxi-driver said. "I could never learn to speak Hindu."

"Hindi," I said, correcting him.

"You see?" the taxi-driver said.

Mrs. di Francesco laughed, and the taxi-driver joined in.

After a while, the taxi came to a stop. "Here we are at home, on a Hundred and Thirteenth Street between Broadway and Amsterdam," Mrs. di Francesco said.

Though I was carrying a bank draft for eighty dollars, I had only two dollars in cash, which a family friend had given me for good luck. I handed it to Mrs. di Francesco for the taxi.

"That won't be enough," she said.

"But it is *seven rupees!*" I cried. "At home, one could hire a tonga for a whole day for that."

**QUESTION:** Why do you think it is so inexpensive to rent a tonga?

"This is New York," she said. She clicked open her purse and gave some money to the taxi-driver.

The taxi-driver put my bags on the curb, shook my hand, and said, "If I go to India, I will remember not to become a tonga driver." He drove away.

**W**e picked up the luggage. Mrs. di Francesco tucked my free hand under her bare arm with a quick motion and started walking. A woman at home would probably have cringed<sup>10</sup> at the touch of a stranger's hand under her arm, I thought, but thinking this did not stop me from making a mental note that the muscle of her arm was well developed.

We went into a house, and walked up to Mr. and Mrs. di Francesco's apartment, on the fourth floor. Mr. di Francesco opened the door and kissed Mrs. di Francesco loudly. Had a bomb exploded, I could not have been more surprised. They'll catch something, I thought. I had never heard any grownups kissing at home—not even in films.

Mr. di Francesco shook my hand. He had a powerful grip and a powerful voice. He took me by the shoulder and almost propelled me to a couch. "This is going to be your bed," he said. "I'm sorry I couldn't come to the airport. Anyway, I knew you wouldn't mind being greeted by a charming lady." He doesn't have a trace of the timid, servile<sup>11</sup> manner of music masters and blind people at home, I thought.

"We had a delightful ride from the airport," I said.

Mr. di Francesco wanted to know why we were so late, and Mrs. di Francesco told him about the theft.

"What bad luck!" he said.

"But I got here," I said.

"That's the spirit," he said, laughing.

"John, thank you for starting dinner," Mrs. di Francesco said from what I took to be the kitchen.

10. *cringe* (krinj), *v.* retreat away from.

11. *servile* (sér/vəl), *adj.* like that of slaves; spiritless.

"Oh, you cook!" I exclaimed. I had never heard of a blind person who could cook.

"Yes, I help Muriel," he said. "We don't have servants here, as they do in your country. We have labor-saving devices." He then showed me around the apartment, casually tapping and explaining—or putting my hand on—various unfamiliar things: a stove that did not burn coal or give out smoke; an ice chest that stood on end and ran on electricity; a machine that toasted bread; a bed for two people; and a tub in which one could lie down. I was full of questions, and asked how natural gas from the ground was piped into individual apartments, and how people could have so much hot water that they could lie down in it. At home, a husband and wife never slept in one bed, but I didn't say anything about that, because I felt shy.

"Do you eat meat?" Mrs. di Francesco asked me from the kitchen. "Aunt Rita—Mrs. Chatterjee—didn't know."

"Yes, I do eat meat," I called back to her. I started worrying about how I would cut it.

**M**rs. di Francesco sighed with relief. "John and I hoped that you weren't a vegetarian. We're having spaghetti and meatballs, which are made of beef. Is that all right?"

I shuddered. As a Hindu, I had never eaten beef, and the mere thought of it was revolting. But I recalled another of Daddyji's sayings, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," and said, "I promised my father that I would eat anything and everything in America and gain some weight."

Mrs. di Francesco brought out the dinner and served it to us at a small table. "The peas are at twelve and the spaghetti and meatballs at six," she said. I must have looked puzzled, because she added, "John locates his food on

a plate by the clock dial. I thought all blind people knew—"

"You forget that India has many primitive<sup>12</sup> conditions," Mr. di Francesco interrupted. "Without a doubt, work for the blind there is very backward."

I bridled.<sup>13</sup> "There is nothing primitive or backward in India."

**"There is  
nothing primitive  
or backward  
in India."**

There was a silence, in which I could hear Mr. di Francesco swallowing water. I felt very much alone. I wished I were back home.

"I didn't mean it that way," Mr. di Francesco said.

"I'm sorry," I said, and then, rallying a little, confessed that Braille<sup>14</sup> watches were unheard of in India—that I had first read about them a year or so earlier in a British Braille magazine, and then it had taken me several months to get the foreign exchange and get a Braille pocket watch from Switzerland.

"Then how do blind people there know what time it is—whether it is day or night?" Mr. di Francesco asked.

"They have to ask someone, or learn to tell from the morning and night sounds. I suppose that things *are* a little backward there. That is why I had to leave my family and come here for education."

"The food is getting cold," Mrs. di Francesco said.

I picked up my fork and knife with trembling fingers and aimed for six. I suddenly wanted to cry.

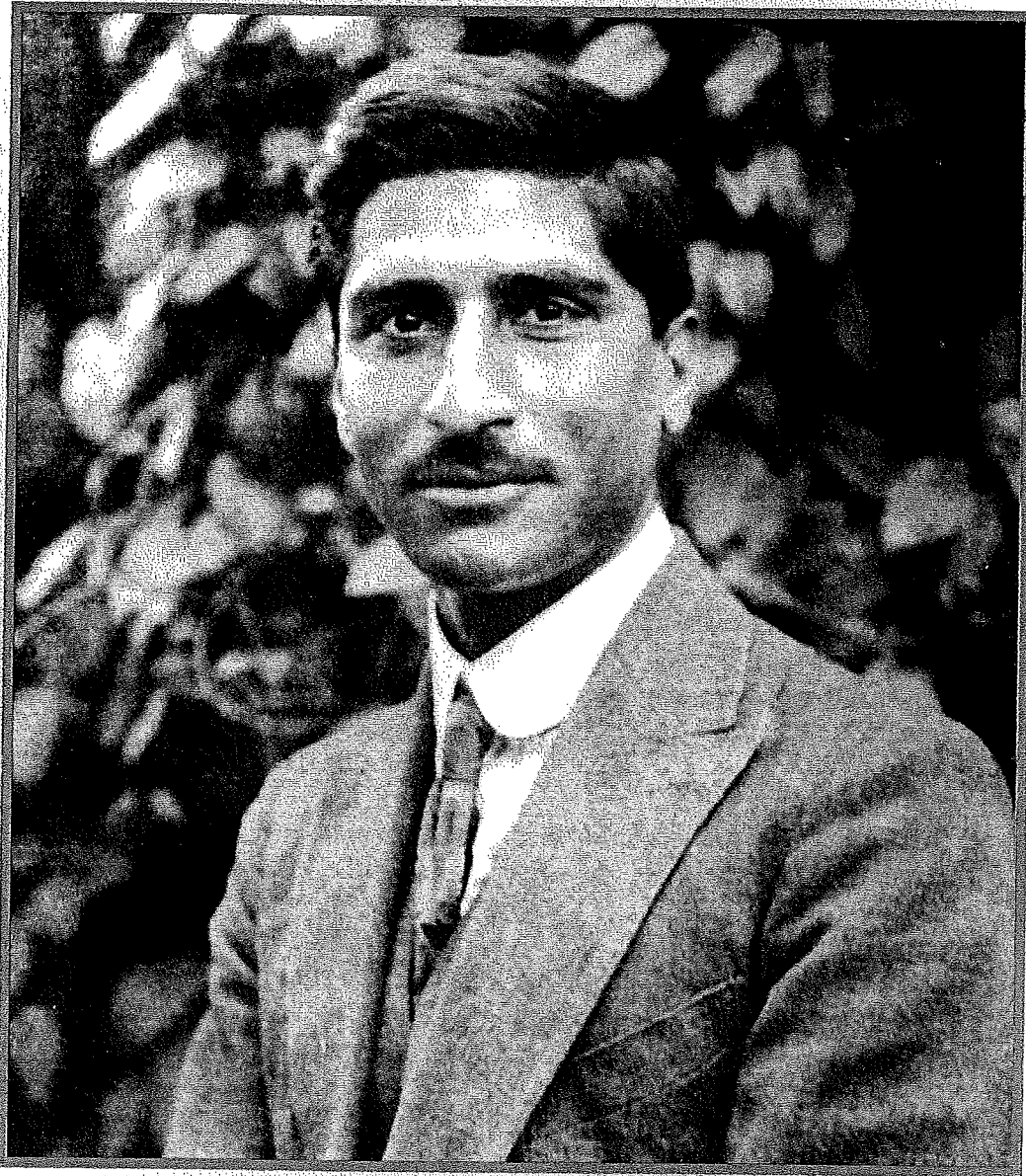
"You look homesick," Mrs. di Francesco said.

I nodded, and tried to eat. A sense of relief

12. **primitive** (prim'ə tiv), *adj.* very simple, such as people had early in history.

13. **bridle** (brī'dl), *v.* lift up one's chin or head to express pride or anger.

14. **Braille**, a system of writing for blind people that uses different arrangements of raised dots.



▲ Ved's father, Daddyji, as he appeared in 1921, shortly after attending school in London. What kind of man do you think Daddyji was?

engulfed me: we had mutton meatballs at home all the time, and they didn't require a knife. But the relief was short-lived: I had never had spaghetti, and the strands were long and tended to bunch together. They stretched from my mouth to my plate—a sign of my Indian backwardness, I thought. I longed for the kedgerree<sup>15</sup> at home, easily managed with a spoon.

**M**rs. di Francesco reached over and showed me how to wrap the spaghetti around my fork, shake it, and pick it up. Even so, I took big bites when I thought that Mrs. di Francesco was not looking—when she was talking to Mr. di Francesco. Later in the meal, it occurred to me that I was eating the food Daddyji had eaten when he was a student abroad. I resolutely bent my face over the plate and started eating in earnest.

Mrs. di Francesco took away our plates and served us something else, and I reached for my spoon.

"That's eaten with a fork," she said.

I attacked it with a fork. "It is a pudding with a crust!" I cried. "I have never eaten anything like it."

"It's not a pudding—it's apple pie," Mrs. di Francesco said. "By the way, we're having scrambled eggs for breakfast. Is that all right?"

I confessed that I didn't know what they were, and she described them to me.

"Oh, I know—rumble-tumble eggs!" I exclaimed. "I like them very much."

They both laughed. "British—Indian English is really much nicer than American English," Mr. di Francesco said. "You should keep it. In fact, I'll adopt 'rumble-tumble.'"

I felt sad that I had come to America for my studies instead of going to England first, as Daddyji had done. But no school in England had accepted me.

"We've heard so much about India from Uncle Manmath," Mrs. di Francesco said. "It must be a very exciting place."

"Yes, tell us about India," Mr. di Francesco said.

I felt confused. I couldn't think of what to say or how to say it.

"You look tired," Mrs. di Francesco said, patting me on the arm.

"I cannot think of the right English words sometimes," I said.

Mrs. di Francesco cleared some things off the table and said, "Don't worry. Now that you're here, your English will improve quickly."

She went to the kitchen and started washing the plates while Mr. di Francesco and I lingered at the table—much as we might at home.

I asked Mr. di Francesco how he had become self-supporting and independent, with a place of his own.

"You make it sound so romantic, but it's really very simple," he said. He spoke in a matter-of-fact way. "I spent twelve years at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, in Massachusetts. I entered when I was seven, and left when I was nineteen."

"Perkins!" I cried. "I have been trying to go there since I was seven. First, they would not have me because of the war. But after the war they would not have me, either—they said that I would end up a 'cultural misfit.'"

"What does that mean?"

"They said that bringing Eastern people to the West at a young age leads to 'cultural maladjustment'<sup>16</sup>—and they said, 'Blindness is a maladjustment in itself.'"

"But now you're here. I'll call Perkins tomorrow and tell them that the damage is already done, and that your cultural maladjustment would be much worse if you were to end up in Arkansas." He laughed.

15. kedgerree, a stew.

16. maladjustment (mal/ə just/mənt), *n.* poor or unsatisfactory adjustment; not fitting in.



"Do you really think they will take me? Dr. Farrell, the director at Perkins, is a very stubborn man."

"They certainly should. Unlike Massachusetts, Arkansas is a very poor state. Arkansas School for the Blind is a state school. They are required to accept all the blind children in the state free of charge. In fact, you'll probably be the only one there paying for board and tuition. The school is bound to have a lot of riff-raff.<sup>17</sup> It's no place to improve your English. In Arkansas, you'll lose all your nice Britishisms and acquire a terrible Southern drawl. You have to go to Perkins. I know Dr. Farrell."

I was excited. "Perkins is said to be the best school for the blind anywhere. How did you like it? How was your life there?"

"Life at Perkins? It was probably no different from that of millions of other kids. We played and studied." He added obligingly, "It was a lot of fun."

Fun—so that's what it was, I thought. That is the difference between all the things he did

at school and all the things I missed out on by not going to a good school.

"And after Perkins?"

"After Perkins, I studied voice at the New England Conservatory, where Muriel and I met. Then I came to New York, started giving voice lessons, married Muriel, and here I am."

"There must be more to tell."

"There really isn't."

"Did Mrs. di Francesco's parents not object? She is sighted."

"I wasn't asking to marry Muriel's parents. She could do what she pleased. This is America."

**PREDICT: What do you think happened to Ved?**



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17. riff-raff (rif/raf'), *n.* people with bad reputations.

## Afterword

No, Ved was not accepted into Perkins Institution for the Blind. The school's enrollment was already filled for the year. Besides, Dr. Farrell suggested to Mr. di Francesco on the phone that accepting such a young student from India would not be good for the young man. Consequently, Ved went on to the Arkansas School for the Blind, where he became president of the school senate and editor of the school paper, which prepared him for a career in journalism. After graduating, he continued his studies at Ponom College in California, Balliol College in Oxford, England, and earned a master's degree at Harvard University. Then he wrote for the *New Yorker*.

# After Reading

## Making Connections

1. In your notebook, make a large copy of the head below. Fill it in with everything that you think must be going on in Ved's mind during his first day in New York.
2. "In life, there is only fight or flight. You must always fight." What did Daddyji mean by this? Do you agree?
3. Read the descriptions of Mr. and Mrs. di Francesco. What sort of information do you get through Ved's words? How do you picture them?
4. Explain how this selection fits the **theme** "Reaching for Your Dream."
5. What do you learn about culture and customs in India from the author? How did the author reveal this information?
6. 🦋 How did Ved Mehta defend his cultural heritage? What does his defense of his native country show about his **individuality**?
7. If you had been in Ved's situation, what do you think would have been the most difficult thing to do or face?



## Literary Focus: Point of View

You are probably already familiar with autobiographies and stories written in the **first person**. You know that literature written in the first person only gives you one person's **point of view**. In the case of the autobiographical piece you just read, the fact that it is told by Ved makes a difference in what you learn and do not learn about Ved's first day in the United States. For example, you do not learn what Mr. and Mrs. di Francesco look like, because Ved doesn't see them. But you *do* learn a lot about how life is experienced by someone who is blind. Go back through the selection and find examples of descriptions the author provides that come from his particular point of view—as an Indian, as a newcomer to New York, and as a blind person. Share and discuss the examples you find with your classmates.



acclimatized  
bridle  
cringe  
immigration  
maladjustment  
primitive  
regale  
riff-raff  
servile  
visa

## Vocabulary Study

On a sheet of paper, write the word from the list that completes each sentence.

A. When I left Finland to live in the United States, I learned about (1) firsthand. At the processing center, an official looked at my passport to make sure that I was the right person. Eyes downward, I assumed a (2) role. Another official looked through my baggage to make sure that I didn't have anything illegal. They don't want any (3) to enter the country. The first official stamped my passport, giving me official permission to visit the country. That's called a (4).

B. A fellow traveler promised to (5) me with stories of adventure and intrigue. You should have seen her (6) with pride when I questioned whether she had really photographed a charging bull elephant. At one point I had to (7) when she told me about the time she almost lost an eye to a bristly boar with a bad attitude.

C. It took me a while to get (8) to my new school. My old school had been a one-room building with eight students. It was (9) compared to this huge building with its two stories. Here, people were nice to me, but I was always afraid of saying something dumb. I guess I was afraid of not fitting in or showing "cultural (10)."

## Expressing Your Ideas

### Writing Choices

**Dear Ved** Imagine you have been given Ved's name as a pen pal. Write a **letter** welcoming him to the United States. In your letter, include a list of things that Ved should know immediately about life in the U.S.

**Dear Diary** Write Ved's **diary entry** about his first day in the United States. What would he think was most important to record? What feelings would he write about, that perhaps he could not have shared with his hosts?

### Other Options

**Background Check** Ved's family had to leave Pakistan for India because the country was Muslim and they were Hindi. Use library resources to find out more about one or both of these religions. Present your findings to the class in an **oral report**.

**Read Without Eyes** Find out more about Braille. Then prepare a **poster** and a **mini-lesson** for your class on the Braille alphabet.

# Harriet Tubman

ANN PETRY

**A**long the eastern shore of Maryland, in Dorchester County, in Caroline County, the masters kept hearing whispers about the man named Moses, who was running off slaves. At first they did not believe in his existence. The stories about him were fantastic, unbelievable. Yet they watched for him. They offered rewards for his capture.

They never saw him. Now and then they heard whispered rumors to the effect that he was in the neighborhood. The woods were searched. The roads were watched. There was never anything to indicate his whereabouts. But a few days afterward, a goodly number of slaves would be gone from the plantation. Neither the master nor the overseer had heard or seen anything unusual in the quarter. Sometimes one or the other would vaguely remember having heard a whippoorwill call somewhere in the woods, close by, late at night. Though it was the wrong season for whippoorwills.

Sometimes the masters thought they had heard the cry of a hoot owl, repeated, and would remember having thought that the intervals between the low moaning cry were wrong, that it had been repeated four times in succession instead of three. There was never

anything more than that to suggest that all was not well in the quarter. Yet when morning came, they invariably discovered that a group of the finest slaves had taken to their heels.

Unfortunately, the discovery was almost always made on a Sunday. Thus a whole day was lost before the machinery of pursuit could be set in motion. The posters offering rewards for the fugitives<sup>1</sup> could not be printed until Monday. The men who made a living hunting for runaway slaves were out of reach, off in the woods with their dogs and their guns, in pursuit of four-footed game, or they were in camp meetings saying their prayers with their wives and families beside them.

Harriet Tubman could have told them that there was far more involved in this matter of running off slaves than signaling the would-be runaways by imitating the call of a whippoorwill, or a hoot owl, far more involved than a matter of waiting for a clear night when the North Star was visible.

In December, 1851, when she started out with the band of fugitives that she planned to take to Canada, she had been in the vicinity of the plantation for days, planning the trip,

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1. fugitive (fyū'jə tiv), *n.* person who runs away or attempts to escape.

carefully selecting the slaves that she would take with her.

She had announced her arrival in the quarter by singing the forbidden spiritual—"Go down, Moses, 'way down to Egypt Land"—singing it softly outside the door of a slave cabin, late at night. The husky voice was beautiful even when it was barely more than a murmur borne on the wind.

Once she had made her presence known, word of her coming spread from cabin to cabin. The slaves whispered to each other, ear to mouth, mouth to ear, "Moses is here." "Moses has come." "Get ready. Moses is back again." The ones who had agreed to go North with her put ashcake and salt herring in an old bandanna, hastily tied it into a bundle, and then waited patiently for the signal that meant it was time to start.

**T**here were eleven in this party, including one of her brothers and his wife. It was the largest group that she had ever conducted, but she was determined that more and more slaves should know what freedom was like.

She had to take them all the way to Canada. The Fugitive Slave Law<sup>2</sup> was no longer a great many incomprehensible words written down on the country's lawbooks. The new law had become a reality. It was Thomas Sims, a boy, picked up on the streets of Boston at night and shipped back to Georgia. It was Jerry and Shadrach, arrested and jailed with no warning.

She had never been in Canada. The route beyond Philadelphia was strange to her. But she could not let the runaways who accompanied her know this. As they walked along she told them stories of her own first flight; she kept painting vivid word pictures of what it would be like to be free.

But there were so many of them this time. She knew moments of doubt when she was half-afraid, and kept looking back over her shoulder, imagining that she heard the sound

of pursuit. They would certainly be pursued. Eleven of them. Eleven thousand dollars' worth of flesh and bone and muscle that belonged to Maryland planters. If they were caught, the eleven runaways would be whipped and sold South, but she—she would probably be hanged.

They tried to sleep during the day but they never could wholly relax into sleep. She could tell by the positions they assumed, by their restless movements. And they walked at night. Their progress was slow. It took them three nights of walking to reach the first stop. She had told them about the place where they would stay, promising warmth and good food, holding these things out to them as an incentive<sup>3</sup> to keep going.

When she knocked on the door of a farmhouse, a place where she and her parties of runaways had always been welcome, always been given shelter and plenty to eat, there was no answer. She knocked again, softly. A voice from within said, "Who is it?" There was fear in the voice.

She knew instantly from the sound of the voice that there was something wrong. She said, "A friend with friends," the password on the Underground Railroad.

The door opened, slowly. The man who stood in the doorway looked at her coldly, looked with unconcealed astonishment and fear at the eleven disheveled runaways who were standing near her. Then he shouted, "Too many, too many. It's not safe. My place was searched last week. It's not safe!" and slammed the door in her face.

2. **Fugitive Slave Law.** In 1793 and 1850, Congress enacted severe laws to provide for the return of escaped slaves. The Underground Railroad was largely a result of public distaste for these laws. Among other harsh measures, the law of 1850 imposed severe penalties upon anyone who helped a slave in his or her escape.

3. **incentive** (in sen'tiv), *n.* thing that urges a person on.



▲ Plate 16 of the *Harriet Tubman* series was painted by Jacob Lawrence in 1939–40. Jacob Lawrence, one of America's most important artists, painted a series of thirty-one paintings of Harriet Tubman's life early in his career. How has Lawrence created a sense of the fear, speed, and secrecy of the runaway slaves in this painting?

She turned away from the house, frowning. She had promised her passengers food and rest and warmth, and instead of that, there would be hunger and cold and more walking over the frozen ground. Somehow she would have to instill courage into these eleven people, most of them strangers, would have to feed them on hope and bright dreams of freedom instead of the fried pork and corn bread and milk she had promised them.

They stumbled along behind her, half-dead for sleep, and she urged them on, though she was as tired and as discouraged as they were. She had never been in Canada, but she kept painting wondrous word pictures of what it would be like. She managed to dispel<sup>4</sup> their

fear of pursuit, so that they would not become hysterical, panic-stricken. Then she had to bring some of the fear back, so that they would stay awake and keep walking though they drooped with sleep.

Yet during the day, when they lay down deep in a thicket, they never really slept, because if a twig snapped or the wind sighed in the branches of a pine tree, they jumped to their feet, afraid of their own shadows, shivering and shaking. It was very cold, but they dared not make fires because someone would see the smoke and wonder about it.

4. *dispel* (dis pel'), *v.* drive away and scatter.

She kept thinking, eleven of them. Eleven thousand dollars' worth of slaves. And she had to take them all the way to Canada. Sometimes she told them about Thomas Garrett, in Wilmington. She said he was their friend even though he did not know them. He was the friend of all fugitives. He called them God's poor. He was a Quaker<sup>5</sup> and his speech was a little different from that of other people. His clothing was different, too. He wore the wide-brimmed hat that the Quakers wear.

She said that he had thick white hair, soft, almost like a baby's, and the kindest eyes she had ever seen. He was a big man and strong, but he had never used his strength to harm anyone, always to help people. He would give all of them a new pair of shoes. Everybody. He always did. Once they reached his house in Wilmington, they would be safe. He would see to it that they were.

She described the house where he lived, told them about the store where he sold shoes. She said he kept a pail of milk and a loaf of bread in the drawer of his desk so that he would have food ready at hand for any of God's poor who should suddenly appear before him, fainting with hunger. There was a hidden room in the store. A whole wall swung open, and behind it was a room where he could hide fugitives. On the wall there were shelves filled with small boxes—boxes of shoes—so that you would never guess that the wall actually opened.

While she talked, she kept watching them. They did not believe her. She could tell by their expressions. They were thinking, New shoes, Thomas Garrett, Quaker, Wilmington—what foolishness was this? Who knew if she told the truth? Where was she taking them anyway?

That night they reached the next stop—a farm that belonged to a German. She made the runaways take shelter behind the trees at the edge of the fields before she knocked at the door. She hesitated before she approached

the door, thinking, suppose that he, too, should refuse shelter, suppose—Then she thought, Lord, I'm going to hold steady on to You and You've got to see me through—and knocked softly.

She heard the familiar guttural voice say, "Who's there?"

She answered quickly, "A friend with friends."

He opened the door and greeted her warmly. "How many this time?" he asked.

"Eleven," she said and waited, doubting, wondering.

He said, "Good. Bring them in."

He and his wife fed them in the lamplit kitchen, their faces glowing, as they offered food and more food, urging them to eat, saying there was plenty for everybody, have more milk, have more bread, have more meat.

They spent the night in the warm kitchen. They really slept, all that night and until dusk the next day. When they left, it was with reluctance. They had all been warm and safe and well-fed. It was hard to exchange the security offered by that clean warm kitchen for the darkness and the cold of a December night. . . .

Harriet had found it hard to leave the warmth and friendliness, too. But she urged them on. For a while, as they walked, they seemed to carry in them a measure of contentment; some of the serenity<sup>6</sup> and the cleanliness of that big warm kitchen lingered on inside them. But as they walked farther and farther away from the warmth and the light, the cold and the darkness entered into them. They fell silent, sullen, suspicious. She waited for the moment when some one of them would turn mutinous.<sup>7</sup> It did not happen that night.

5. **Quaker**, a member of a Christian group called the Society of Friends. The Quakers participated actively in the antislavery effort.

6. **serenity** (sə ren'ə tē), *n.* peace and quiet.

7. **mutinous** (myüt'n əs), *adj.* rebellious; uncontrollable.

Two nights later she was aware that the feet behind her were moving slower and slower. She heard the irritability<sup>8</sup> in their voices, knew that soon someone would refuse to go on.

She started talking about William Still and the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee.<sup>9</sup> No one commented. No one asked any questions. She told them the story of William and Ellen Craft and how they escaped from Georgia. Ellen was so fair that she looked as though she were white, and so she dressed up in a man's clothing and she looked like a wealthy young planter. Her husband, William, who was dark, played the role of her slave. Thus they traveled from Macon, Georgia, to Philadelphia, riding on the trains, staying at the finest hotels. Ellen pretended to be very ill—her right arm was in a sling, and her right hand was bandaged, because she was supposed to have rheumatism. Thus she avoided having to sign the register at the hotels, for she could not read or write. They finally arrived safely in Philadelphia, and then went on to Boston.

No one said anything. Not one of them seemed to have heard her.

She told them about Frederick Douglass,<sup>10</sup> the most famous of the escaped slaves, of his eloquence,<sup>11</sup> of his magnificent appearance. Then she told them of her own first vain effort at running away, evoking<sup>12</sup> the memory of that miserable life she had led as a child, reliving it for a moment in the telling.

But they had been tired too long, hungry too long, afraid too long, foot-sore too long. One of them suddenly cried out in despair, "Let me go back. It is better to be a slave than to suffer like this in order to be free."

She carried a gun with her on these trips. She had never used it—except as a threat. Now as she aimed it, she experienced a feeling of guilt, remembering that time, years ago, when she had prayed for the death of

Edward Brodas, the Master, and then not too long afterward had heard that great wailing cry that came from the throats of the field hands, and knew from the sound that the Master was dead.

One of the runaways said, again, "Let me go back. Let me go back," and stood still, and then turned around and said, over his shoulder, "I am going back."

She lifted the gun, aimed it at the despairing slave. She said, "Go on with us or die." The husky low-pitched voice was grim.

He hesitated for a moment, and then he joined the others. They started walking again. She tried to explain to them why none of

them could go back to the plantation. If a runaway returned, he would turn traitor, the master and the overseer would force him to turn

traitor. The returned slave would disclose the stopping places, the hiding places, the cornstacks they had used with the full knowledge of the owner of the farm, the name of the German farmer who had fed them and sheltered them. These people who had risked their own security to help runaways would be ruined, fined, imprisoned.

She said, "We got to go free or die. And freedom's not bought with dust."

This time she told them about the long agony of the Middle Passage<sup>13</sup> on the old slave

**We got to go free or die. And freedom's not bought with dust.**

8. irritability (ir'ə tə bil'ə tē), *n.* impatience; unnatural sensitivity; annoyance.

9. Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, a group of citizens who guided slaves and helped pay their way North.

10. Frederick Douglass (1817–1895), an ex-slave who became a leading figure in the antislavery movement through his eloquent lectures and abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*.

11. eloquence (el'ə kwəns), *n.* flow of forceful speech.

12. evoke (i vōk'), *v.* call forth; bring out.

13. Middle Passage, the slaves' journey from Africa to the New World across the Atlantic Ocean.

ships, about the black horror of the holds, about the chains and the whips. They too knew these stories. But she wanted to remind them of the long hard way they had come, about the long hard way they had yet to go. She told them about Thomas Sims, the boy picked up on the streets of Boston and sent back to Georgia. She said when they got him back to Savannah, got him in prison there, they whipped him until a doctor who was standing by watching said, "You will kill him if you strike him again!" His master said, "Let him die!"

**T**hus she forced them to go on. Sometimes she thought she had become nothing but a voice speaking in the darkness, *cajoling*,<sup>14</sup> urging, threatening. Sometimes she told them things to make them laugh, sometimes she sang to them, and heard the eleven voices behind her blending softly with hers, and then she knew that for the moment all was well with them.

She gave the impression of being a short, muscular, *indomitable*<sup>15</sup> woman who could never be defeated. Yet at any moment she was liable to be seized by one of those curious fits of sleep, which might last for a few minutes or for hours.<sup>16</sup>

Even on this trip, she suddenly fell asleep in the woods. The runaways, ragged, dirty, hungry, cold, did not steal the gun as they might have, and set off by themselves, or turn back. They sat on the ground near her and waited patiently until she awakened. They had come to trust her implicitly, totally. They, too, had come to believe her repeated statement, "We got to go free or die." She was leading them into freedom, and so they waited until she was ready to go on.

Finally, they reached Thomas Garrett's house in Wilmington, Delaware. Just as Harriet had promised, Garrett gave them all new shoes, and provided carriages to take them on to the next stop.

By slow stages they reached Philadelphia, where William Still hastily recorded their

names, and the plantations whence they had come, and something of the life they had led in slavery. Then he carefully hid what he had written, for fear it might be discovered. In 1872 he published this record in book form and called it *The Underground Railroad*. In the foreword to his book he said: "While I knew the danger of keeping strict records, and while I did not then dream that in my day slavery would be blotted out, or that the time would come when I could publish these records, it used to afford me great satisfaction to take them down, fresh from the lips of fugitives on the way to freedom, and to preserve them as they had given them."

William Still, who was familiar with all the station stops on the Underground Railroad, supplied Harriet with money and sent her and her eleven fugitives on to Burlington, New Jersey.

Harriet felt safer now, though there were danger spots ahead. But the biggest part of her job was over. As they went farther and farther north, it grew colder; she was aware of the wind on the Jersey ferry and aware of the cold damp in New York. From New York they went on to Syracuse, where the temperature was even lower.

In Syracuse she met the Reverend J. W. Loguen, known as "Jarm" Loguen. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Both Harriet and Jarm Loguen were to become friends and supporters of Old John Brown.<sup>17</sup>

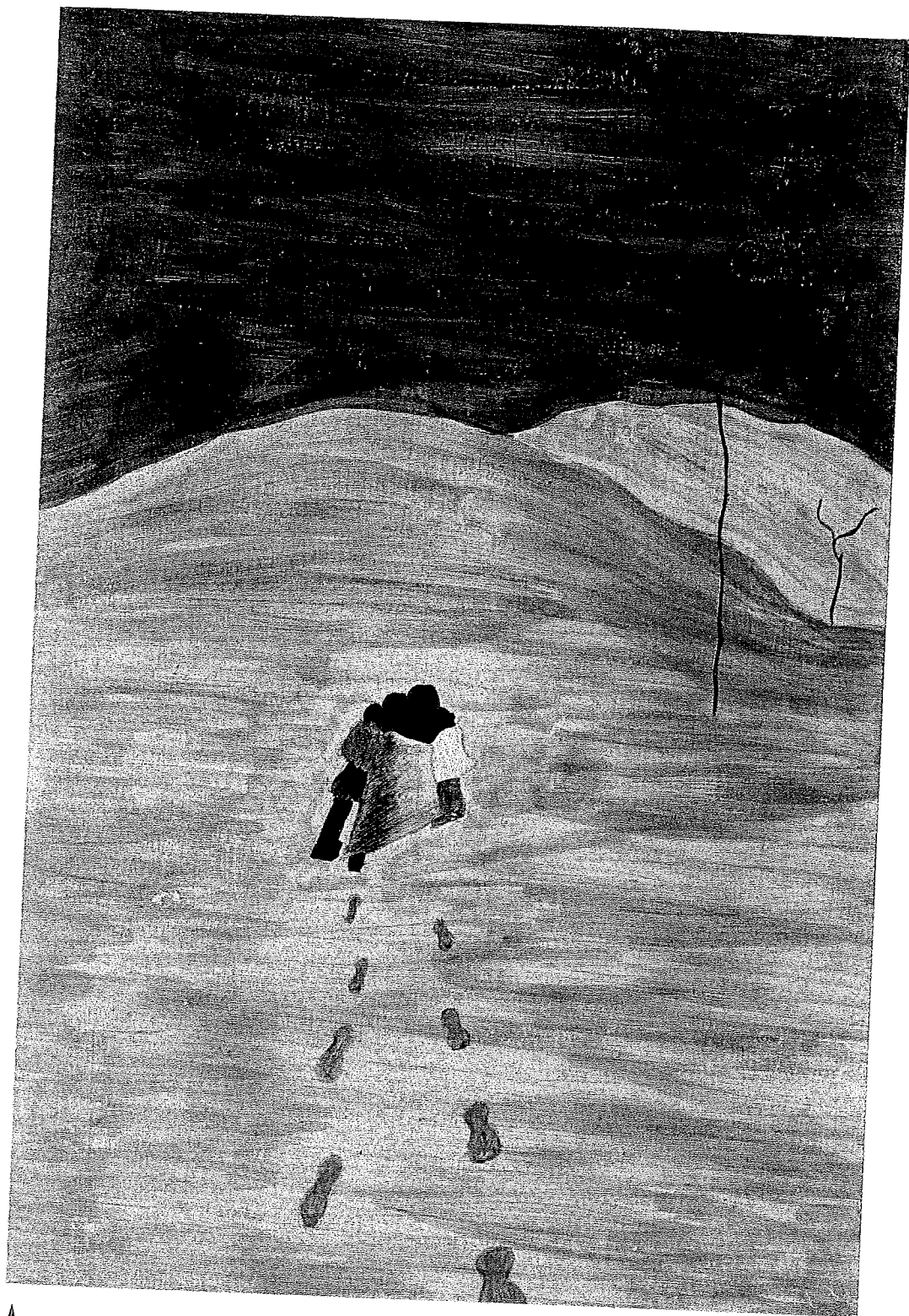
14. *cajole* (kə jōl'), *v.* persuade by pleasant words or flattery; coax.

15. *indomitable* (in dom'ə tə bəl), *adj.* unbeatable; unconquerable.

16. *curious . . . hours*. At thirteen, Harriet Tubman nearly died from a blow on her head. The heavy blow caused periodic sleep seizures that troubled her throughout her life.

17. *Old John Brown* (1800–1859), a devoted American abolitionist who tried to stir up a rebellion among the slaves. When he attempted to raid a government arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859, he was captured and executed.





▲ In plate 20 of the *Harriet Tubman* series by Jacob Lawrence (1939–40), Harriet Tubman leads the escaped slaves into Canada. How is this painting similar to plate 16 (page 207)? How is it different?



From Syracuse they went north again, into a colder, snowier city—Rochester. Here they almost certainly stayed with Frederick Douglass, for he wrote in his autobiography:

“On one occasion I had eleven fugitives at the same time under my roof, and it was necessary for them to remain with me until I could collect sufficient money to get them to Canada. It was the largest number I ever had at any one time, and I had some difficulty in providing so many with food and shelter, but, as may well be imagined, they were not very fastidious in either direction, and were well content with very plain food, and a strip of carpet on the floor for a bed, or a place on the straw in the barn-loft.”

**L**ate in December, 1851, Harriet arrived in St. Catharines, Canada West (now Ontario), with the eleven fugitives. It had taken almost a month to complete this journey; most of the time had been spent getting out of Maryland.

That first winter in St. Catharines was a terrible one. Canada was a strange frozen land, snow everywhere, ice everywhere, and a bone-biting cold the like of which none of them had ever experienced before. Harriet rented a small frame house in the town and set to work to make a home. The fugitives boarded with her. They worked in the forests, felling trees, and so did she. Sometimes she took other jobs, cooking or cleaning house for people in the town. She cheered on these newly arrived fugitives, working herself, finding work for them, finding food for them, praying for them, sometimes begging for them.

Often she found herself thinking of the beauty of Maryland, the mellowness of the soil, the richness of the plant life there. The climate itself made for an ease of living that

could never be duplicated in this bleak, barren countryside.

In spite of the severe cold, the hard work, she came to love St. Catharines, and the other towns and cities in Canada where black men lived. She discovered that freedom meant more than the right to change jobs at will, more than the right to keep the money that one earned. It was the right to vote and to sit on juries. It was the right to be elected to office. In Canada there were black men who were county officials and members of school boards. St. Catharines had a large colony of ex-slaves, and they owned their own homes, kept them neat and clean and in good repair. They lived in whatever part of town they chose and sent their children to the schools.

When spring came she decided that she would make this small Canadian city her home—as much as any place could be said to be home to a woman who traveled from Canada to the eastern shore of Maryland as often as she did.

In the spring of 1852, she went back to Cape May, New Jersey. She spent the summer there, cooking in a hotel. That fall she returned, as usual, to Dorchester County, and brought out nine more slaves, conducting them all the way to St. Catharines, in Canada West, to the bone-biting cold, the snow-covered forests—and freedom.

She continued to live in this fashion, spending the winter in Canada, and the spring and summer working in Cape May, New Jersey, or in Philadelphia. She made two trips a year into slave territory, one in the fall and another in the spring. She now had a definite crystallized purpose, and in carrying it out, her life fell into a pattern which remained unchanged for the next six years.

## Another Voice

### Go Down, Moses

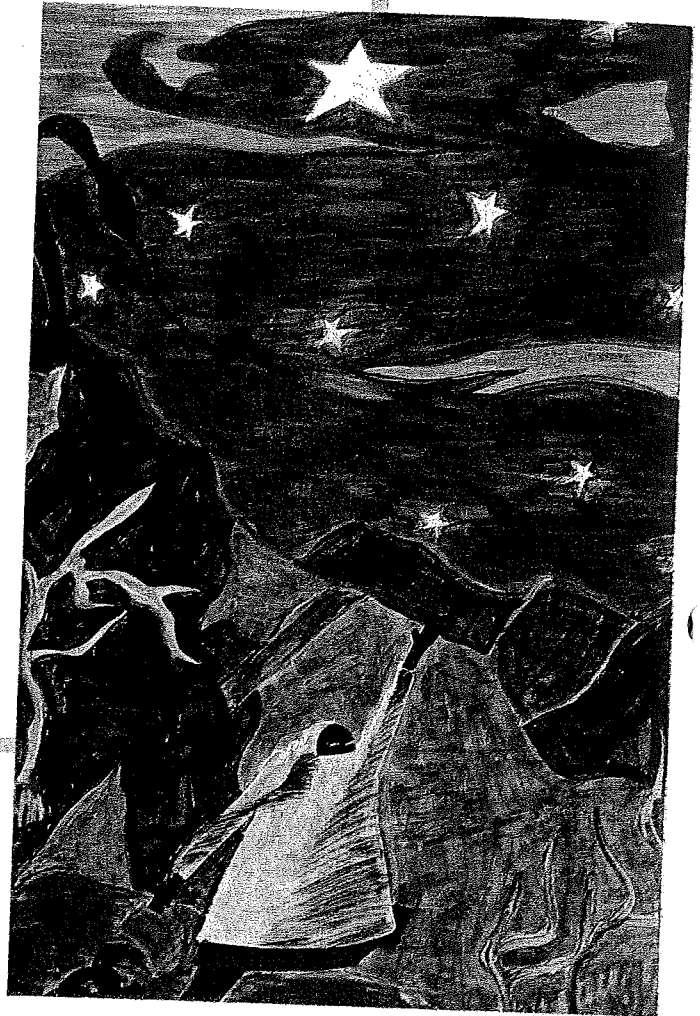
When Israel was in Egypt's land,  
Let my people go!  
Oppress'd so hard dey could not stand,  
Let my people go!

#### *Chorus*

5 Go down, Moses,  
Way down in Egypt's land.  
Tell ole Pha-raoh,  
Let my people go!

Thus say de Lord, bold Moses said,  
10 Let my people go!  
If not I'll smite your first-born dead,  
Let my people go!

No more shall dey in bondage toil,  
Let my people go!  
15 Let dem come out wid Egypt's spoil,  
Let my people go!



▲ Plate 10 of the *Harriet Tubman* series by Jacob Lawrence (1939–40) portrays Harriet Tubman's escape from slavery when she was between twenty and twenty-five years old. What symbols do you see in the painting?

# After Reading

## Making Connections

1. What part of this selection stands out the most for you? Why?
2. What did Harriet Tubman mean by the words, "... freedom's not bought with dust"?
3. The author is writing over one hundred years after these events. What evidence does she give that her information is accurate?
4. Some slaves wanted to turn back at various points. What methods did Harriet use to persuade them to continue?
5. What **character traits** does Harriet Tubman show on the trip from Maryland to Canada? Give an example for each trait you list.
6. 🗨️ How was life in Canada different from life in Maryland for Harriet? How did her past prepare her to cope with the **changes**?
7. 🗨️ What injustices are you aware of in the world today? Are leaders working to **change** these injustices? Support your answer.

## Literary Focus: Mood

As Harriet Tubman leads her party of runaways to Canada, the mood is fearful and full of suspense. The runaways move only at night. They constantly look over their shoulders, afraid of being followed. They keep quiet, jumping at every sound. The **mood**, the atmosphere or feeling of a work, is created by the author through her choice of the setting, details, images, events, and words.

Review the selection to see how Ann Petry created a suspenseful mood. Find what you think to be the two most suspenseful moments in the narrative. In your writer's notebook, list specific words and details that help create the mood.

## Vocabulary Study

Write the word from the list at the top of the next page that best completes each sentence.

1. Once he had escaped, each \_\_\_\_ had a price on his head.
2. The reward money was a strong \_\_\_\_ to find the missing people.
3. Once they began the long journey, there was no peace or \_\_\_\_ for the slaves until they reached Canada.

cajole  
indomitable  
eloquence  
dispel  
evoke  
irritability  
fugitive  
mutinous  
incentive  
serenity

4. At times the runaways became \_\_\_\_ and began to rebel.
5. Fear and harsh conditions increased the \_\_\_\_ of the fugitives.
6. Harriet Tubman's \_\_\_\_ as a speaker helped to convince the slaves to continue the journey.
7. Harriet often had to tease and \_\_\_\_ the runaways, trying to convince them to go on.
8. She often told stories that made word-paintings, stories to \_\_\_\_ images of what freedom would be like.
9. Harriet described the people who would help them along the way, hoping to \_\_\_\_ the fears of the runaways.
10. Her \_\_\_\_ spirit made her always push on, in spite of dangers.

## Expressing Your Ideas

### Writing Choices

**Making a Reference** Write a brief **encyclopedia entry** on Harriet Tubman's role in the Underground Railroad. Review the story for the information you will need, noting time markers to help you with the sequence.

**For Her Great Valor . . .** Assume that Harriet Tubman has been chosen to receive a "Show of Courage" award for her service to others. Write a **commendation** or tribute in which you explain why she deserves the award.

**Civil Disobedience** Harriet Tubman broke the law in helping slaves escape. The theory of "civil disobedience," or refusing to obey a law that you consider unjust, is one with deep roots in religious and political thought. Research the views of one of the great leaders in civil disobedience—Henry David Thoreau, Mohandas Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, Jr.—and write a **research paper** explaining this person's views on civil disobedience.

### Other Options

**The Great Escape** Prepare a **map** that covers the area from eastern Maryland to St. Catharines, Canada West (now Ontario). Trace the route to Canada taken by Harriet Tubman and the eleven runaways. You will need to reread the selection and note the stops that are mentioned. You might find the map on page 204 helpful.

**Now You See It. . . .** Sketch or build a **model** of the inside of Thomas Garrett's store. Show how the entire wall could swing open to reveal the hidden room behind it, the room where he hid runaway slaves.

**Interview with a Runaway** Harriet Tubman is the focus of the events in this selection. Change that focus by developing the character of one of the eleven slaves who made the journey with her. Working with a classmate, prepare **interview questions** for the runaway and then prepare the answers. Conduct the interview as if you were at a meeting in Canada.